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TO RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 0115  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0028  
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO IMMEDIATE 0017  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2553  
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE  
RUCOGCA/NAVSTA GUANTANAMO BAY CU IMMEDIATE  
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIASS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFIASS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 001115

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2017

TAGS: CU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL

SUBJECT: DISSIDENTS WANT TO CONSTRUCT HOMES FOR POOR CUBANS

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Todos Unidos, an umbrella organization of several dissident organizations, is entering a totally new field of activity by developing a project to renovate the homes of poor Cubans. They plan to start with 12 homes in the Arroyo Naranjo neighborhood of Havana. USINT believes the project merits close USG examination. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On 28 November Vladimiro Roca Antunez of Todos Unidos, a coalition of several opposition groups that includes leading figures such as Martha Beatriz Roque and Rene Gomez Manzano, presented to USINT a project to renovate the homes of poor Cubans with volunteer labor. This is the first attempt on the part of this organization, which has usually presented demands for reform and disseminated information about human rights violations, to engage in concrete efforts aimed at improving the living standards of the average Cuban. Roca commented that many in the movement want to develop stronger links with the common people of the island struggling with severe economic deprivation. He was struck by the willingness of average Cubans to engage openly with known dissidents. Roca described the towns-people as saying, "Since the (Cuban) government will not help us, we are turning to you (dissidents)."

¶3. (C) The group has enlisted architects, engineers and qualified construction foremen to make an assessment of family homes in a state of disrepair and to develop a reconstruction plan. Human rights advocates will approach people living in poor communities throughout the country. Members of the organization are presenting this as a community development project, and are avoiding labeling it as opposition to the government. Todos Unidos have already completed an assessment including projected costs of refurbishing 12 residences in the neighborhood of Arroyo Naranjo in Havana and are searching for resources to complete the work. The process of obtaining permission to build or expand homes is complicated but Roca emphasizes there is a firm legal basis in the constitution and in statute for

undertaking this project.

¶4. (C) Comment: Since Raul Castro's speech of 26 July, Cubans have been openly discussing their low standard of living, and the government's failure to date on delivering meaningful reforms to end scarcity of food and basic services. This project is a further example of the opposition recognizing that ordinary Cubans expect to see improvements in the availability of basic goods, the lack of adequate housing and the deteriorating health and education systems. While not being in a position yet to judge the technical merits of Roca's project, we believe Roca's proposal is the sort of thing the USG should be moving toward and urge relevant US agencies, such as USAID, to examine it closely.

PARMLY